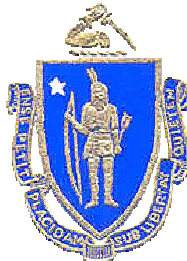




North Shore Public Hearing Summary Report

**May 26, 2004
5:00-7:00 p.m.
North Shore Community College**



MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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PREFACE

On May 26, 2004 the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women held its fourteenth public hearing at the North Shore Community College in Danvers.

The purpose of this hearing was for the North Shore community and the Commission to learn about priority issues affecting the women of this region of the Commonwealth. This is a summary of the information presented at that hearing.

This report will be distributed to the State Legislature and the Governor. The Commission appreciates the input provided through this hearing and will utilize this information to advocate for positive changes for the women of the North Shore and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Attendees:

Commissioners

Nilka Alvarez-Rodriguez
Martha Chadwick
Lianne Cook
Donna Finneran
Catherine Greene
Frances Hogan
Dr. Helen Jackson
Dianne Luby
Maria Marasco
Angela Menino
Carol Pimentel

MCSW Staff

Linda Brantley, Executive Director
Paula Daddona, Program Manager
Darlene Kelter, Administrative Assistant
Courtney Gross, Intern

Elected Officials

State Representative Mary Grant, Beverly
State Representative Ted Speliotis, Danvers
The Honorable Bill Scanlon, Mayor of Beverly

Community Participants

Lyssa Anderson, American Association of University Women and Unitarian
Universalist Association
Jane Bright, Healthlink
Wayne Burton, President, North Shore Community College
Carol Collins, Cape Ann/NS NOW
Veronica Cora, Girls, Inc.
Helen Corbett, Corbett & Lalli
Eleanor Davis, YWCA
Crisniel Diaz, Girls Inc.
Jocelyn Duff, Coastal Medical Associates
Dale Earl, League of Women Voters
G. Forney
Idonia Gaede, Essex District Attorney's Office

Community Participants Continued

Nancy Hamlin, Healthlink
David Hart, Tailored for Success, Inc.
Elizabeth Hart, Tailored for Success, Inc.
Patricia Ho, American Association of University Women
Bonnie Howard, NOW, WAND, and Health Quarters
Kimberly Jo O'Hara, Essex County Sheriff's Department
Sara Mailander
Noelle Medugnu
Lee Mondale, League of Women Voters and Healthlink
Roberta Moss, Health Quarters
Mary Sheehan
Deborah Swanson, Help for Abused Women and their Children
Francine Wakuwa, Girls, Inc.
Candace Waldron, Help for Abused Women and their Children
Mary Wasserman, NSCC Adjunct Faculty
Susan Whalen, Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition

Introduction and Welcome: Wayne Burton, President of North Shore Community College

President Wayne Burton of North Shore Community College welcomed the Commission on the Status of Women to Danvers and praised the Commission on its exceptional work with women and family issues.

President Burton highlighted some of the College's programs, which motivate young women to achieve success. Specifically, President Burton spoke of a program entitled Transition for Choices, Challenges and Change, which enables females from diverse economic backgrounds to receive an undergraduate education. President Burton also emphasized a scholarship program the school initiated through the Essex County House of Corrections. Through this program many women who have experienced traumatic hardships are able to revitalize their ambition and begin their educational journeys anew.

President Burton described North Shore Community College as a particularly female institution. He concluded his introduction by welcoming State Representative Mary Grant and Mayor Will Scanlon of Danvers, and wished the Commission luck in its pursuit of protecting women's rights.

Introduction and Welcome: Dianne Luby, MCSW Hearing Chair

Serving as Hearing Commission Chair, Dianne Luby, welcomed community members to the MCSW public hearing.

Commissioner Luby thanked President Wayne Burton for his welcome and acknowledged Representative Mary Grant and Mayor Will Scanlon. Commissioner Luby then asked all of the present members of the Commission to introduce themselves and to note where in the state they reside. Commissioner Luby then introduced members of the MCSW staff.

Commissioner Luby explained the process and the purpose of the public hearing to those in attendance. She described how the Commission was trying to gather information on the status of women in Massachusetts and would then distribute this information to the Governor and the State Legislature. The Commission would hear testimonies, then ask each individual questions as necessary. Commissioner Luby explained that many similar issues and conflicts in society regarding women have arisen throughout Massachusetts.

Commissioner Luby proceeded by asking any elected official if they would like to speak. Representative Grant spoke briefly, praising the recent involvement of the MCSW with the Caucus of Women Legislators in the House and Senate, and explained her eagerness to work with the group more extensively in pursuit of better policy decisions. Other elected officials declined to speak, noting they were in attendance to listen.

Summary of Testimony

The following summaries are based on notes from the hearing, the audiocassette recording of the testimony and submitted written testimony.

Candace Waldron

Help for Abused Mothers and their Children

Candace Waldron spoke of the accomplishments of Help for Abused Mothers and their Children (HAWC) and of the connection between attitudes and behaviors, for example, a male's belief in his superiority over his female partner or spouse. She said that instances of domestic violence often occur because men believe women are second-class citizens.

She explained that many instances of homelessness are linked to previous occurrences of domestic violence. According to Ms. Waldron, many women become entangled in court and the abusive partner is often given custody of the children because of pro-bono panels, inadequate access to legal representation, an uneducated case worker population, and the effects of funding cuts "stretching the system." Ms. Waldron explained that 88% of homeless mothers have been abused by a family member or relative. Domestic violence is also the primary cause of homelessness in women and children. Ms. Waldron stated there are 86 homeless families on the North Shore with 134 homeless children. She also described the discrepancies within the current shelter system and the need for transitional housing.

She said that the transition out of violence into a safe, affordable, sustainable home requires temporary support. It requires access to job training for the future, emergency cash, options for child support, emergency assistance, and transitional housing.

Ms. Waldron continued by recommending legislative initiatives for the Commission to support. One initiative coordinates domestic violence training for state employees, while the other provides residential assistance for families in transition.

Commissioner Dianne Luby

Commissioner Luby asked Ms. Waldron to what extent her research covered the North Shore.

Ms. Waldron replied it covered twenty-three cities and towns on the North Shore.

Commissioner Frances Hogan

Commissioner Hogan explained that the issue of domestic violence is one of the Commission's chief priorities and she understands that more education of state employees is needed.

Ms. Waldron answered by describing some of the families with whom her organization works, in which children will bounce from shelter to shelter, often attending more than three elementary schools in a year. Ms. Waldron explained how evident the issue of homelessness and children is. Families need stability and mothers need economic support to move from a crisis situation to an income-paying job that can support them, she noted.

"State statistics show economic stability for a family of three requires an income of about \$35,000. For most of the families we work with, that is far and away from what they are able to earn. So the two options are: that she go back with the abusive partner so she's not homeless, or she goes from emergency shelter to emergency shelter," Waldron said.

Commissioner Catherine Greene

Commissioner Greene asked what one would do in terms of implementing some of the training in the courts and where that would lie in terms of court jurisdiction.

Ms. Waldron replied by stating that judges, regardless of their biases, should train judges. She also explained that HAWC was actively working with probate courts. Ms. Waldron explained there is not a lot of accountability in probate courts, which inhibits the battered women from being heard.

Commissioner Nilka Alvarez Rodriguez

Commissioner Alvarez Rodriguez asked whether there was any way to incorporate all of the state agencies involved with the family into the courts. She also asked whether there was anything more democratic put together by DSS and whether DSS was participating in anything that does have title.

Ms. Waldron stated that DSS was working on the issue, but the Commission, when making a budget analysis, should determine how the budget cuts have

affected the case workers and their ability to assess situations. Ultimately, the system is inadequately funded, she said.

Commissioner Rodriguez then inquired whether Senator Kennedy's initiative with Section 8 Housing could alleviate the problem.

Ms. Waldron replied that the Jane Doe Coalition and other domestic violence programs had been in support of Senator Kennedy's advocacy.

Susan Whalen

Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition

Susan Whalen, of the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition, began her testimony by stating that the incidence rates of breast cancer in women have increased from one in eight to one in seven over the past year.

She noted that according to the American Cancer Society statistics for 2004, Massachusetts ranks third in the nation in incidence rates for breast cancer. Almost 216,000 new cases of breast cases will be diagnosed this year compared to 211,000 last year. And 5,100 of these will be in Massachusetts.

Ms. Whalen explained that the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition believes the key to suppressing this epidemic is by researching and reacting to environmental impacts in the state. She noted, "the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition believes only five to ten percent of breast cancer is linked to heredity. Environmental toxins may cause the other 90 to 95 percent."

Ms. Whalen spoke of a study founded by the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition in coordination with the Silent Spring Institute. This study looked at the high incidence rates of breast cancer on Cape Cod. The results concluded that many toxic chemicals surpassed the regulations enforced by the state. DBT, a toxic chemical banned thirty years ago, was found in the majority of homes on the Cape.

Ms. Whalen concluded her testimony by asking the Commission to endorse the Precautionary Principle, which emphasizes the prevention of breast cancer by reducing toxic chemicals in cosmetics and the environment.

Commissioner Helen Jackson

Commissioner Jackson asked Ms. Whalen whether there had been an increase of breast cancer in men.

Ms. Whalen was unsure whether breast cancer in men had increased.

Commissioner Alvarez-Rodriguez

Commissioner Alvarez-Rodriguez asked Ms. Whalen if the Coalition had received support from the Department of Public Health.

Ms. Whalen explained that the Department was a partner on the Silence Spring Study and the results of the study were being formally presented next week.

Commissioner Luby

Commissioner Luby stated that 890,000 women over the age of 40 had yet to be screened by a mammogram. Commissioner Luby explained that prevention can be defined as getting these women screened.

Nancy Hamlin
Health Link

Nancy Hamlin's testimony concentrated on the environmental impacts of mercury. She explained that mercury has polluted our waterways, which consequently inhibits Massachusetts' residents from eating fresh water fish. Ms. Hamlin emphasized the importance of recommending to women and young children not to eat these fish.

Ms. Hamlin continued by recommending the Commission endorse education for women in regards to the dangerous materials in cosmetics. Many of these scented products, according to Ms. Hamlin, are responsible for the deterioration of women's health.

Ms. Hamlin then spoke of the Children and Family Protection Act, which regulates the use of pesticides by schools. Ms. Hamlin said 80 percent of schools in Massachusetts are not complying with the act. She recommended that the Commission take a strong stance on the issue.

Ms. Hamlin, in concluding, spoke of the absence of childcare in Massachusetts. There are no federal regulations that would guarantee childcare, while everyday there is an influx of women joining the workforce. Ms. Hamlin stated there is a definite and increasing need for affordable childcare.

Lee Mondale***League of Women's Voters***

Lee Mondale spoke of breaking down the specific categories that women's issues are often divided into. She encouraged the Commission to think beyond these categories, because many of these problems are often linked. For instance, Ms. Mondale said it is often very important to think of women's health at the same time the Commission is combating pay equity. "One can not be a good working mother, mother of a family, or a productive member of our society if we're not well," Ms. Mondale said. Combining all of these categories

will increase the general well being of women in Massachusetts. Ms. Mondale emphasized the importance of education and prevention, which she believes are the key elements to increasing the happiness and health of the women of Massachusetts, she said.

Commissioner Luby

Commissioner Luby stated that many individuals must go to several different state agencies to get one task accomplished. She explained there are possibilities which would better integrate services and be much more convenient for the individual.

Patricia Ho

American Association of University Women

Patricia Ho explained women need more access to reproductive choices and health care. Family planning programs and comprehensive sex education for young girls are essential in achieving equality and justice beyond economic barriers. Those who cannot afford health care should still be provided with birth control, emergency contraception, information, and counseling.

Ms. Ho continued by stating many of the budget cuts have paralyzed these programs, especially on the North Shore, where the fertility rate is the highest in the entire state. Ms. Ho endorsed such programs as Health Quarters, Planned Parenthood, and other family planning services.

Ms. Ho concluded by endorsing the sale of emergency contraceptives in pharmacies and emergency rooms. "In economic terms, it has been reported that the cost of providing one years worth of planning family services is \$300 versus the \$10,000 costs of prenatal and delivery care for one unintended pregnancy. In human terms, the value of responsible decision-making is incalculable," she noted.

Roberta Moss

Health Quarters

Roberta Moss began by describing Health Quarters, which is a family planning service center that provides reproductive health care to individuals with little or no insurance. Many of the patients at Health Quarters are 200 percent below the federal poverty level, which means many make less than \$18,606 a year. If fully funded, Health Quarters prevents almost 30,000 unintended pregnancies a year. However, the budget cuts have left many of their programs in disarray or abandoned completely.

According to Ms. Moss, in 2002, Health Quarters lost their HIV counseling and testing funding from the Department of Public Health. The state also eliminated

half of their STD clinics. The Lynn Health Quarters clinic, which is now closed, was the first STD clinic in the country.

Health Quarters has also been forced to reduce their employees and core services. "At the start of this fiscal year our state family planning contract retained only 35% of its original funding. We had to close our Malden office, which served over 1,100 women and teenage girls a year. As the year progressed through efforts of our staff we were able to have some of our funding restored such that we are ending this fiscal year at 59% of our state funding."

Ms. Moss asked the Commission to ensure the availability of family planning services through an increase of funding in the fiscal year 2005.

Commissioner Luby

Commissioner Luby asked if Health Quarters not only cut the amount of people they serve, but whole programs.

Ms. Moss replied that they cut most STD programs.

Lyssa Anderson

American Association of University Women, AAUW

Lyssa Anderson described the multiple organizations with which she is involved, including: the AAUW, the National Organization for Women, Planned Parenthood Federation of Massachusetts, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, the ACLU, and the North Shore Coalition to Protect Choice. Ms. Anderson, however, explained she would be speaking as a faith-based sexuality educator.

Ms. Anderson relayed the concern she had for the information being disseminated in schools in the North Shore community. Ms. Anderson believes that what schools are offering as sex education is fear based and inaccurate. Lack of information, according to Ms. Anderson, is again becoming very popular which leads to irresponsible decision making by adolescents.

Commissioner Maria Marasco

Commissioner Marasco asked Ms. Anderson what particular resources she thought were appropriate.

Ms. Anderson explained she is a teacher with the Unitarian Universalist Association that promotes a comprehensive sex education curriculum, which she recommends. However, in a secular system there is not much being authored, she said. Ms. Anderson believes the curriculum in schools presently is predominantly abstinence only education, which is damaging and relays an

intimidating message to adolescents. “These are all very negative things and if you take it to a larger conclusion kids are being taught that if you have sex you are going to become very sick and you’re going to die,” she noted.

Ms. Anderson explained that adolescents would have sex anyway and realize that they will not die. Consequently, young adults will take much larger risks because they are inadequately informed. Ms. Anderson concluded that adolescents would pay no attention to the risk factors of becoming sexually active, because they do not believe they are true. Ms. Anderson would like to see educators and the Commission rally against this misinformation and would like to see the correct information be distributed. She noted there must be a drastic step up from what is being disseminated in schools presently.

Commissioner Lianne Cook

Commissioner Cook asked Ms. Anderson whether she was aware of the Massachusetts statute that outlines the content of sexuality education.

Ms. Anderson was unsure of the exact statute, but said that organizations who accept federal funding will be more restricted on content and curriculum.

Commissioner Alvarez-Rodriguez

Commissioner Alvarez-Rodriguez explained there is a rekindling of old ideas which some believe hinders the progression of children’s education. Commissioner Alvarez-Rodriguez described many minority communities who are infuriated by the way a class is conducted. One way to prevent this is to consider support programs for parents.

Ms. Anderson agreed with Commissioner Alvarez-Rodriguez and stated that many children are practicing risky sexual behavior, because they do not even realize it is dangerous. The lack of information can be attributed to the belief that anything short of intercourse is safe.

Crisnie Diaz

Girls, Inc.

Ms. Diaz explained that she was from an after school program, Careerpath, which helps adolescent girls get jobs and internships.

Ms. Diaz addressed the issue that many young girls who live in urban areas are much more inclined to become pregnant at a younger age than their peers living in rural or suburban areas. She witnesses girls one year younger than herself becoming pregnant everyday. Ms. Diaz explained if schools had more after school programs, young females would be able to focus their interests. There is a waiting list of 40 girls for a program at Girls, Inc., she said. She stated that if there had been more funding all of the girls could have been

accepted. The resources, however, are not there and many young females are missing out on this opportunity.

Commissioner Greene

Commissioner Greene asked Ms. Diaz the personal impact of Girls, Inc. and where Ms. Diaz thinks she would be today without the program.

Ms. Diaz explained she has a very strong household, which would have disciplined her if Girls, Inc had not been accessible. However, Girls, Inc. enabled Ms. Diaz to teach others, become a better person, and take advantage of all of the opportunities that cross her path.

Commissioner Alvarez Rodriguez

Commissioner Alvarez Rodriguez commented on how many times people focus on negative aspects of the community rather than on the specialized talents of individuals in these communities.

Mary Sheehan

Mary Sheehan explained she was going to speak about a hidden population that affects the lives of women and children everywhere: grandparents raising grandchildren. She described how for a year and a half she has been raising her grandchildren, and that the economic effects of the situation are strenuous. Health insurance is one issue that effects this particular family situation. Ms. Sheehan described that although Mass Health can cover some children, grandparents are often forced to work full time as well. Being that the majority of grandparents are age fifty and above, there is an enormous amount of economic stress on the family.

Ms. Sheehan also described the lack of childcare available due to this economic strife. Ms. Sheehan explained a small stipend from the Department of Transitional Assistance can be acquired, but it will not even cover the cost of day care. She said the cost of childcare could be as expensive as \$260 a day, which does not include a snack or meal. Financial support, Ms. Sheehan stated, is clearly needed to help this constituency. She would like to see more support groups, resources, agencies, and funding to alleviate some of the pressure for this generation.

Commissioner Luby

Commissioner Luby asked if there were support groups.

Ms. Sheehan stated there are support groups, however none of them provide daycare. Many grandparents cannot attend because babysitting is too expensive and certainly if there were babysitting provided there would be an increase in attendees.

Commissioner Hogan

Commissioner Hogan spoke of a housing project in Boston called Grandparents Housing Program where a section of affordable housing was built specifically for grandparents raising grandchildren. Commissioner Hogan commented that the issue hasn't been completely ignored and there is potential for the issue to receive more attention.

Ms. Sheehan explained she believed that was progressive, but there are no opportunities similar to that program on the North Shore.

Dorothy Geeka

Ms. Geeka explained she was looking through the World Almanac recently and noticed most states have a graduated income tax. Ms. Geeka believes if Massachusetts obtained graduated income tax instead of the short-term capital gain, it might solve some of the recent funding and capital dilemmas.

Jane Bright
Health Link

Ms. Bright explained how Health Link had noticed a disproportional amount of breast cancer in Marblehead. The group looked at the effects of living in the shadow of Salem Power Plant, which led to an investigation of the environmental impacts on women's health. Eventually regulations were passed to force power plants to clean up. Three years later, however, nothing has significantly changed, she noted.

Ms. Bright continued by stating the American economy and the consumer is often a scapegoat for companies to illustriously ignore the law. According to Ms. Bright, companies excuse environmental impacts because of the fear of downsizing. Ms. Bright, however, believes cleaning up the area would stimulate job opportunities.

Closing Remarks

Commissioner Luby closed the hearing at 7 p.m., thanking all of the attendees for their insight and participation. She encouraged those who testified to submit written testimony to the Commission for accuracy.